

The Randon Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

## Gisburn Forest.

Once upon a time, nestled in the picturesque countryside, there lay a charming township called Gisburn Forest. Throughout the year, this place offered a myriad of experiences for its visitors. Whether one preferred to explore on foot, horseback, or bike, Gisburn Forest had something to offer to everyone. Its enchanting trails led adventurers through popular routes and secluded glades, while the forest's accreditation as a Dark Sky Discovery Site made it a perfect destination for stargazing after dusk.

Gisburn Forest, the largest forest in Lancashire, held a rich history dating back centuries. Near the western border of the parish, beside Brown Hills Beck, stood a magnificent bowl barrow—a testament to the Neolithic or Bronze Age eras. This oval mound of earth, standing 10 meters high and measuring 40 by 30 meters, whispered ancient stories of bygone times. Another similar mound could be found across the stream in Easington, adding to the air of mystery that shrouded the area.

The manor of Gisburn Forest had deep roots in history, recorded in the Domesday Book. It was once part of the Percy Fee, a significant landholding. In 1189, Matilda de Percy, the widow of William de Beaumont, 3rd Earl of Warwick, bestowed grazing rights and timber privileges to Sawley Abbey. The generous donation was made official by Matilda's grandnephew, William de Percy, 6th Baron Percy, in 1211 when he donated the entire manor.

Over time, ownership of the manor changed hands. In the 16th century, it fell into the possession of Thomas Browne, who acquired the largest estate in the township from his relative, Mary, the third wife of Sir Robert Burdett. Grunsagill, the center of this vast estate, became an integral part of the Gisburn community.

Gisburn held historical events of note, such as the granting of the charter for Gisburn Fair by King Henry III in 1260. This lively market took place every Monday, accompanied by an annual three-day fair, commencing on the Eve, Day, and Morrow of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The fair boasted a wide array of goods for sale, including wooden vessels—perhaps used for meals and buckets in ancient times.

In the heart of Gisburn, two ancient "instruments of justice" once stood—the Stocks and the Cuck Stool. Although their exact locations remain unknown, it is believed that the Stocks, a form of punishment for men, resided in the Market Place, while the Cuck Stool, a ducking stool for women, stood near running water.

To the north of the village, along the Settle road, stood a Norman-era earthen castle known as Castle Haugh. Also called Cromwell's Basin, this circular mound with its 5 to 6-meter height commanded impressive views of the surrounding Ribble Valley. Nearby, an opened "barrow" revealed a crude earthen urn, evoking thoughts of ancient rituals and burials.

Transportation played a crucial role in the history of Gisburn, with the Roman road from Ribchester to Ilkley passing through the parish. This connection to the Romans showcased the township's significance in the region.

In 1749, a petition was made to the Lord of the Manor of Gisburn to erect a Market Cross. The request shed light on the vibrant market culture that extended beyond cattle trading. It was evident from the petition that the market encompassed various activities, including the ancient sport of bullfighting, as it asked for the Cross to be erected in the Bull Ring. The Cattle Market, which was held in the Main Street until recently, added to

the town's liveliness. Two public wells provided water to the community in those times. Adorning the north side of the church was the magnificent Gisburne Park mansion, which once served as the residence for the holders of the esteemed title "Lord Ribblesdale." The park itself boasted roaming cattle of great repute. The park's entrance featured two stunning Gothic-style lodges adorned with intricately carved figures and pinnacles—an architectural marvel designed by a previous Lord Ribblesdale. The Lister family, who later adopted the title "Ribblesdales," resided at Westby Hall on the Blacko Road, adding to the area's historical lineage.

Legends and tales intertwined with Gisburn's history, such as the visit of Oliver Cromwell, who stayed for a night or two in Gisburne. His troopers, in need of stabling for their horses, took shelter in the village church, causing damage to the stained glass windows. The Listers of that era cautiously aligned themselves with the Parliamentary cause, lending support to Cromwell and his soldiers.

The township's connection to the Church remained strong. At the northeastern end of the churchyard stood the Priory, although not the original structure. Local lore suggested that the former house may have been inhabited by Nuns, possibly those from Rayhead in Gisburn Forest, who were once patrons of the Church.

History's darker side left its mark on Gisburn as well. In the early 15th century, the area suffered from lawlessness and violence. In 1401, a Vicar of Skipton traveling between Sawley and Gisburn fell victim to a brutal murder. The Rector at the time, Thomas Banaster, had to request the Bishop's intervention to cleanse the churchyard after such bloodshed. The tale of the Gisburne Martyr echoed through the ages, recounting the story of Richard Simpson, a priest, schoolmaster, and martyr. Initially a Protestant Minister and Schoolmaster, Richard converted to Roman Catholicism and faced persecution from the Protestants. He went into hiding, continuing his missionary work in various parts of Lancashire. As School Master in Gisburne, he became known by the nickname "Guile." Eventually, in 1588, he met his fate, being executed near Derby. His head and quarters were displayed on poles, a gruesome sight. Yet, in an act of reverence, they were later stolen and given a proper burial.

Gisburn's tale intertwined with the nearby Pendle area, infamous for its stories of witches. One such connection was found in the Arraignment and Trial of Jennet Preston of Gisburn in Craven, documented in a pamphlet printed in London in 1612. Jennet, who had received kindness and hospitality from the Westby family, was accused of murdering a child. After her release from York Castle, she attended a gathering of witches at Malkin Tower, seeking assistance to harm her prosecutor, Martin Lister. Shortly afterward, Lister died, and witnesses at Jennet's trial testified that he had identified her as the cause of his demise. Her guilt was sealed when she touched Lister's dead corpse, causing it to bleed fresh blood—an indication of her status as a murderer. Jennet was found guilty and met her fate on the gallows, showing no remorse or fear. Her husband, present at the execution, expressed satisfaction at her deserved punishment.

Over time, the spelling of Gisburne changed to Gisburn when the Railway Company proposed the alteration, arguing that it would save numerous hours each year. The railway line was opened in 1885, ushering in a new era of transportation and connectivity. The hamlets surrounding Gisburn showcased their own unique charm, with farmhouses boasting exquisite mullion windows, cozy Ingle Nook fireplaces, and beautiful beams.

Among the hamlets, Paythorne housed a Wesleyan Chapel constructed in 1830, while Horton boasted a Congregational Chapel established back in 1670. Rimington also had

a Congregational Chapel dating back to 1817. Rimington was also the residence of Francis Duckworth, a composer known for his hymn tunes. One of his popular compositions, "Rimington," was often sung to the hymn "Jesus Shall Reign." Francis Duckworth found his final resting place on the northeast side of the churchyard, with a gray granite memorial bearing the musical notes of his beloved tune. Throughout the years, Gisburn's history unfolded like a rich tapestry, interweaving tales of nobility, religious strife, and local legends. As time moved forward, the township continued to evolve, embracing progress while honoring its remarkable past.

By Donald Jay